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THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

Summary

The article presented here, has been written with regards to the conceptions of Catholics in relation to the general structure of the church. Starting from the Statements of the Second Vatican Council and post-councilary theology, the authors outline a hierarchical, egalitarian and transitive structural principle of the church. After an appropriate operationalization, these three structural principles are to be presented to 441 respondents of Dutch and German parishes. The authors want to investigate to what extent the ecclesiastical discussion is felt at the basis of the Catholic church since the last council. Besides, does the investigation give any information regarding the ecclesiastical preference of Catholics? By means of this research one hopes to get a little closer to the *sensus fidei* as far as the construction of the church is concerned.

Introduction

Theologians and sociologists often mention the Catholic church as a classic example of a normative organization (Van der Ven 1993, 350; Etzioni 1961, 40-41; Mayntz 1963, 56). People commit themselves to such an organization for a normative accordance with its values and goals, to which they personally engage themselves (Van der Ven 1993, 225-226). Such accordance, which could also be called a normative consensus, can be attained within the church primarily by communication (Van der Ven 1993, 224). The condition for a communication aimed at consensus is, however, that the opinions and perceptions of the faithful are being heard. In theological terms we could say, that the *sensus fidei* has to be taken seriously (Vorgrimler 1985). This means nothing more than, when defining what the values and standards of the church should be, theologians should consider the different expressions of the religious perception of faith and also those of religious life (Vorgrimler 1985; Kehl 1992, 45). In order, however, to arrive at a reliable knowledge in relation to this, an empirical-theological research is necessary (Van der Ven 1990). It is in this sense that we regard this article as a contribution to get a little closer to the *sensus fidei*.

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To do this, we will proceed as follows: In a first paragraph, we describe our starting-point, while stating the necessity of an empirical scrutiny of the perceptions of the faithful with regard to the structure of the church. As a result, we arrive at a clearly defined problem of research (Par. 1). After that, we describe the various opinions taken from theological literature relating to the structure of the church (Par. 2). In a following paragraph, we empirically examine two hypotheses on the basis of our study of literature (Par. 3). We conclude with a summary of the results which we have found. (Par. 4).

1. Divergent opinions about ecclesiastical structures being the causes of internal church-conflicts

In this article, we strive to grasp the *sensus fidei* in relation to the structure of the Catholic church. Our decision for choosing this aspect of the consciousness of faith, has been based on two reasons.

The first reason is that the church has to struggle with internal conflicts on every level. This certainly holds true for the upper levels of the church, which means for the global or the national level. At this point, we want to remind you — for example — of the dismissal of Bishop Jacques Gaillot of Evreux at the beginning of this year. But even the local level is not spared disputes. For example, the performance of a litany celebration could lead to fervent discussions. The choice of a particular prayer or the sermon often excite the minds of the faithful. A subject of particular irritation is the role of the woman within the congregation. The contents of religious education and catechesis is not infrequently a field of furious disputes, either. Moreover, including laymen not only in the execution, but particularly in the decision-making process of the ecclesiastical and ministerial leadership of the parish, is a subject of particular irritation (Sonnberger & Van der Ven 1992, 234-235). Those conflicts are not rarely based upon diverging opinions regarding the organization of the church. This means that the question as to who is supposed to be superior, equal or subordinated to whom for what reason, is answered in various ways.

A second reason for coming to terms with the opinion of the faithful on this point, lies in the ambiguity of the statements of the second Vatican Council regarding the organization of the church. The statements of the Council are of particular significance here, because during the past 25 years within the church, many an internal church-reform has been and still is based on its remarks. Owing to the ambiguity of the documents themselves, intense dis-

cussions have taken place and still do. In order to illustrate the ambiguity of the statements of the Council, one could point to the document *Lumen Gentium* (LG) on the dogmatic constitution of the church. Here, one can find two different views on the church and on the distribution of power within the church. In chapter 9-17, LG speaks of the church as the people of God, which finds its distinct expression in the notion of the common priesthood of all faithful (LG 10). Opposed to this stands an ecclesiology, which departs from completely different points of view, namely, the hierarchical superiority of the incumbents and the matching subordination of the faithful (LG 18-30). In view of this, we can speak of two trends within the church. One of which regards church as an idea of *communio ecclesiarum* and *communio fidei*, the other one emphasizing the special mission and responsibility of the incumbents (Pottmeyer 1983). This shism cannot simply be seen as a product of a premature or wrong interpretation of the documents of the Council. The second Vatican Council has deliberately omitted to try and arrive at a clear definition of the church. It commits itself to no theological school of thought (Dulles 1986). Therefore, the church is moving in its self-awareness between participation and hierarchy, as the 1985 synod of bishops also showed (Komonchak 1986; Van der Ven & Van Gerwen 1990).

Both motives we now take as a reason for thoroughly engaging ourselves in the following question: what views about the general structure of the church do Catholics have at the basis of the church and what are the consequences for further empirical-theological research into the self-image of church?

2. The ecclesiological variety in theory and empiricism

The ecclesiological variety that has already been pointed out above, and the conflicts springing from this, have made us investigate the post-councilary literature regarding comprehensible theological conceptions about the general structure of the church. In the course of this, we have come across three basically distinguishing perceptions. We have come to the conclusion, that the ecclesiological dichotomy, which can be found in LG, is inadequate for describing the spectrum of meaning within theology, well. Therefore, we do not want to talk about a division into two, but about one into three, here. For, besides the materially conceived hierarchical understanding of the church, the *communio*-notion from LG can be interpreted into two directions. One of these directions is an egalitarian church concept which can also be conceived materially, whereas the other one is a transitive image of the church which can be understood in a formal way. This distinction between formal and

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material points of view, follows analogously the differentiation between formal and material ecclesiological paradigm (Van der Ven 1990, 76-81).

In order to answer our question of research formulated above, we will first explain in detail the three distinguishing conceptions that have been mentioned, in the form of three principles of church structure. We look upon a general ecclesiastical structural principle as a fundamental idea, from the basis of which the conceptions of the general form of the church are developed. The principles that have been worked out below, do not claim to reflect upon the theology of a certain theologian or of a certain theological school of thought. They rather represent a summary of different aspects and characteristics of a fundamental structural idea, that is, a structural principle.

First, we will discuss the hierarchical structural principle (par. 2.1), secondly the egalitarian one (par. 2.2) and finally the transitive structural principle (par. 2.3). Following on that, we will briefly summarize the results (par. 2.4).

2.1 The hierarchical structural principle

Theologians, with whom we came across elements of the hierarchical structural principle, refer to the hierarchical organization of the church, when defining its identity. However, what does this hierarchical organization actually mean?

2.1.1 The office of bishop

Here, one starts from the principle, that the organization of the church on all levels is based, in essence, upon the office of bishop which is connected with the enthronement. This office is connected with specific power (*potestas*). The power connected with this office goes back to JESUS Himself as a result of a hierarchical argument (Anciaux 1963, 31). As a New-Testament foundation, reference is primarily made to the appointment of the Twelve and the installation of the primate of St. Peter in St Mark 3. From St Mark 3:13-16 one comes to the conclusion, that JESUS deliberately did not leave his followers as a disorganized group, but structured them by appointing a small group of twelve to a special position. In order to support this argument, the following are mentioned: Matt. 10:1-4, St Luke 6:13-16 and St John 6:70. Not only due to their appointment, but also because of the fact, that JESUS has created the Eucharist in their presence, the Apostles receive a special status. They are the ones upon whom the power of commitment and renouncement is bestowed in Matt. 18:18 and who therefore receive part of the

authority given to Peter (Gewiess 1977, 145-148). The structure of his disciples, which was carried through by JESUS, is made comprehensible by the aspect of the church, that is, due to the fact, that HE formed the faithful into the firm unity of the church, into GOD's community of the end of times. They are supposed to be the carriers of the Kingdom of GOD until HIS return (Gewiess 1977, 148). It is further pointed out, that following the Resurrection and Ascension of JESUS, these Twelve have been regarded as a closed group with a privileged position (Rigaux 1977, 283). The special status of Peter, which is also accepted and acknowledged by Paul, is especially emphasized by theologians with reference to 1Cor. 15:5-8. Paul reports here that the Resurrected first appeared to Kephaz and only after this, to the Twelve. "However the church has not stopped at the structuring of Apostles and the remainder of the faithful. According to the Acts of the Apostles 6:1-6, the Twelve, as the leaders of the ancient Jerusalem parish, entrusted seven men of good reputation, men full of spirit and wisdom with the table service for the hellenistic widows, in order to relieve them" (Gewiess 1977, 153). That means, that according to this, the Apostles are passing on their power to others and thus structure life in the parishes. In St John 20-21, the mission of the Apostles is interpreted to this effect, that JESUS wanted to make it clear by means of this act, that it was his wish that the successors of the Apostles, that is, the bishops, would be the shepherds in his church until the end of times (LG 18). The appointment is understood to have been given to the real historical people, as well as to their successors, whereby the thought of appointment and ordination is traced back horizontally to Apostolic times. Through the episcopal consecration, the ministries of dogma and leadership are passed on together with the ministry of sanctification. The actions of the bishops take place in persona Christi (LG 21). The bishop as final leader of a local church, that is, of a diocese, stands in the *successio apostolica*, which means, in the direct succession of the Apostles (Ratzinger 1982, 257-259). The local church, that is, the diocese itself is regarded as a full church. As the bishop fully shares in the high-priesthood, royal and priestly power of CHRIST, he is the authoritative teacher on faith in his diocese. Besides this exclusive power granted to them, the bishops are also considered to be the symbol and guarantor of unity, whereby they are understood to be the representatives of the entire church (Auer & Ratzinger 1983, 186-188).

2.1.2 The office of priest

A special status is due to the priest within the hierarchical train of thought, in view of the fact, that his office is derived from that of the bishop. The priest

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becomes here the keyfigure in the hierarchy of the local church, that is, in the parish. His authority, however, is of a lesser kind than that of the bishop. He distinguishes himself from the other faithful by the fact, that he alone in persona Christi is allowed to lead the Eucharist and to speak the words of transsubstantiation. He receives this assignment, as well as the assignment of the leadership of a congregation, from the bishop and therefore shares in his power. "The priests, however, do not have the highest stage of the priestly ordination and depend in the execution of their power on the bishops. Nevertheless, they are connected with them in their priestly dignity and by virtue of the sacrament of the consecration in accordance with the picture of CHRIST, the highest and eternal priest, consecrated to preaching the Gospel, to being shepherds to the faithful and to celebrating the service of worship and are thus, really priests of the new covenant. At the stage of their office, they participate in the office of the true mediator of CHRIST" (Auer & Ratzinger 1983, 273). To Ratzinger it is clear, that the New Testament itself placed the hyphen between the office of the Apostle and that of the presbyter (that is, the priest), so that the structural circumstances of the one are also that of the other. The presbyter (priest) is, according to him, principally included in the mediation service of JESUS CHRIST as much as the Apostle (bishop) (Ratzinger 1982, 295). Through this direct line dating back to the beginning of Christianity and due to the reference to JESUS and His deeds themselves, the hierarchical structural principle gains stability. Through his ordination, the priest is joined with the Apostles in a horizontal line via the bishop and through his deeds vertically with CHRIST himself. The celebration of the Eucharist is the true central assignment of the priest and the most meaningful one. Scheffczyk himself calls it the centre of radiation, the light of which shines on all the conduct and actions of the priest (Scheffczyk 1980, 424). With the sacrament of consecration, the church now executes one of its basic rights, according to Rahner, by means of which it reconstitutes itself (Rahner 1984, 402). As a preliminary stage to the actual special priesthood, the office of deacon is mentioned as an hierarchical structural thought. The deacon in turn shares in the hierarchy in a subordinated way, because of his consecration. Due to this, he ranks above the layman.

2.1.3 The laymen

In a hierarchically conceived church, the responsibility and influence of the non-consecrated faithful, on the other hand, clearly have their place in the 'world' and not in the church (Miktat 1965, 743; Chenu 1966, 305). As a result, the layman is not regarded as a carrier of the hierarchy, but is only entitled to a subordinated role within the church. This subordinated role is not

only restricted to the true qualification for the sacramental service, but also includes such areas as preaching and leadership, so that the layman is excluded in these areas from having any influence and actions on his own responsibility.

2.2 *The egalitarian structural principle*

Another possibility for understanding the canonical structure lies in the thought of defining it on the basis of the fundamental equality of all faithful. This equality of all faithful is being justified by various theologians, with whom we found corresponding ideas, by the fact that every faithful member is presented with charismatic gifts. In case we use the charisma as a justification for the equality of rights of all faithful, on the basis of which a general understanding of the structure of the church is developed, one has to explain what is meant by charisma.

2.2.1 The notion of charisma

There are, however, different opinions on this subject matter. On the one hand, charisma is primarily regarded as a vision exceeding human comprehension. In that case, it is the influence of the Holy Spirit on the faithful, which has not been institutionally transferred through sacraments and which cannot be extracted by people. Consequently, the charisma serves right through or beyond the sanctification of the recipient as the edification of the host of CHRIST, that is, the church. By means of its miraculous abundance, its continuous manifestation and its victorious vivacity, it proves itself as a power acting through the Holy Spirit exceeding human power. By this conception, it gives testimony of the origin of Christianity and the church itself. This testimony is understood as a testimony against the world and against those ruling forces and powers in it, which the church can only defeat by means of the charismatic power of its spirit (Gewiess 1958, 1025-1027). Charisma is conceived as a manifestation, which people do not have a grip on and which is also beyond human understanding and human abilities. One time, it serves the structure of the church and another time it serves its defence.

On the other hand, charisma is also understood to be a gift of GOD to each individual, which, in fact, does not manifest itself through unusual, but rather through everyday human qualities. The meaning of charisma is herewith defined much broader. It is established within the general world of experience of people. In this respect, reference is made to the writings of Paul. The

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notion of charisma is mentioned 16 times in the Epistles of Paul and once in the first Epistle of Peter, as a gift from GOD, which encloses the largest diversity of human skills (Carson 1987, 19). It was Paul, who made this concept, which was usually used outside of its religious context until then, into a Christian terminus technicus (Herten 1976, 57). The theological justification of the charisma as an argument in favour of the equality of all people, calls on Paul's conviction that, with the establishment of the church, the end of times had arrived and, therefore, the abundance of the Holy Spirit had come down on everyone with all its might. During the dispute within the parish of Corinth, Paul reaches for the concept of charisma and consciously uses it as a corrective. It seems useful to him, to unify the different enthusiastic phenomena together with other functions of parish life under one roof concept. Through this concept, they are, at the same time, interpreted as gifts which, depending on the Giver, vary and as services, complementing one another through the relationship with the image of the host, that aim at the advancement of the whole (Brockhaus 1972, 227). According to Paul, there is no function in the parish, which revives and dominates the parish, that does not have the effect of the Spirit and therefore would not be a charisma. The pneuma given to each one of the faithful, dominates and determines this (Brockhaus 1972, 232-233).

2.2.2 Charisma as a justification for equality

It is observed that in Paul, the distinction between natural phenomena such as the gift of speaking or of teaching and supernatural manifestations such as the gift of tongues or of miraculous healing, is of secondary importance. Both forms of Godly gifts are equal in principle, which is proven in 1Cor. 14. Furthermore, reference is made to the charisma tables in the first Epistle to the Corinthians and the Epistle to the Romans as a justification for the equality of gifts on which the equality of all people has been based. For example, in 1Cor. 12:28, the supernatural gift of tongues is placed at the end, whereas it is not mentioned at all in the charisma table in Rom. 12:6-8. It seems that Paul does not attribute more value to it than to the other ones. The office of principal as a natural charismatic manifestation, does not receive a special position on either table. In Rom. 12:6-8 it is mentioned at the last but one position and in 1Cor. 12:28 it is not mentioned at all (Küng 1985, 215-225). Consequently, in the church both have been accepted, the routine-like one as well as the extraordinary one. "Real charisma only blossoms when people offer what they are, what they own and what they are able to do when serving GOD as well as their brothers and sisters. They are aware of their abilities being linked to the Holy Spirit and manage them in a way similar to the

talents from the Gospel. Such a form of organization within the parish of the church can only then retain its high factor of integration and prevent, that one oppresses the other and that less evangelical minds seize sacral power, if love is at the heart of everything" (Boff 1985, 273). Thus, charisma becomes, in either an ordinary or supernatural form, a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit among the members of the parish. The Holy Spirit brings about that everything they do, is done and destined to the welfare of all (Boff 1985, 273). Since everyone is a carrier of a charisma of equal quality, existing side by side, all are considered equal with reference to 1Cor. 7:7: "Everyone has received his very own gift from GOD, one this, the other that" (Küng 1985, 218).

2.2.3 Equality and communio

As a foundation of the egalitarian structural thought, one falls back on the idea of *communio* of the second Vatican Council. The following text documents are, in this respect, taken into consideration: in the ninth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* (LG 9) GODS' people are said to be a chosen people and there is said to be a royal priesthood. In LG 10 the royal priesthood of all faithful is at the centre of interest and in LG 11 they even mention a priestly community. It is argued that with that, a fundamental aspect of the church clearly comes into prominence, namely, that it does not consist of a hierarchically arranged community, but of people who continuously have to turn to the Gospel. In view of this document, it is clearly stated that the church is a community of equals. In it, CHRIST performs his salvation and everyone benefits from the Holy goods thus received. All differences within the community become of secondary importance on the basis of this conception. Consequently, all faithful are GOD's people. Therefore, the church can never merely be a certain class or caste, never only a certain authority or in-crowd within the community of the faithful. Theologians have come to the conclusion that everyone belongs to the chosen people, the royal priesthood and the Holy people. All members of GOD's nation have been appointed by GOD, exculpated by CHRIST and sanctified in the Holy Spirit. And all members of GOD's nation have been invited by CHRIST's message to faith, to obedience and to a total devotion to love. With respect to this, they are also all equal within the church. The equality is regarded as far more important than all the differences that also exist within GOD's nation (Küng 1985, 151-160).

As a result, the priesthood is said to belong to everyone. Every member of the community is allowed to possess some priestly rights and functions. The priesthood regarded within the egalitarian conception of the church then

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means: all people have direct access to GOD, which means that they do not require any mediation of the priest. They can all make spiritual sacrifices, because CHRIST's sacrifice, which has taken place once and for all, has fulfilled all priestly means of atonement and has made them redundant at the same time. All people can and are allowed to preach GOD's Word. Furthermore, all people are invited to perform baptisms, the Lord's Supper and the remission of sins, not only passively, but also actively. After all, everyone has a mediator function. Every Christian is a priest for the world (Küng 1985, 440-457).

Under this presupposition, we have to state that in such a conception of the church, which is based on the equality of all people, the faithful are promoted to being the subject of ecclesiastical acting. They are the ones, who determine and form the church, its acts, its structure and its life. In other words, it is basically about the move from the church of clients to the responsibility of all members. This responsibility not only relates to the marginal areas of the church, but also concerns itself with its entire life, including its leadership and preaching. Reference is thus made to the fact, that the Christian message could spread so quickly from the start, because it was passed on by not just a few specially authorized missionaries, but by everyone, according to talent and opportunity, which means not only by the Apostles and Evangelists, but also by merchants, soldiers and sailors (Küng 1970, 184).

If, in the case of an egalitarian conception of the structures of the church, one can only speak of true co-responsibility of the faithful, when everyone is allowed true co-decision (Greinacher 1969, 216-217), this will have drastic institutional consequences. First of all, the necessary special services are looked upon within the distribution of work and not as an implied qualitative order of ranking. Thus nobody is released from the gift and duty of priesthood. An egalitarian organization of the church therefore means the exclusion of all legal order and institutionalization. This is precisely the original claim and conviction of the early church, according to numerous authors, and thus the real structural organization of CHRIST's church (Sohm 1967, 54-55)

2.3 The transitive structural principle

Finally, the transitive structural principle starts, as the egalitarian one does, with the conception of the church as *communio*, as taken from the document *Lumen Gentium*. However, what does a transitive church mean?

2.3.1 The transitivity of the church

Transitivity of the church means, that it continuously negotiates about its actual form in discussions with the context of actual circumstances. Therefore, we can also call this a formal structural principle. On the Protestant side, the term of transitive-functional church was used as the basis for his practical theology by the theologian Nitzsch as early as the 19th. century (Nitzsch 1847, 13; Bassermann 1972, 196; Drehsen 1988, 153-160). Transitivity means that structures do not have any right of themselves. Thus there are neither concrete structures *de iure divino* nor any other motivated stipulations of certain forms of the church. Therefore, a transitive church cannot refer to a specific model of the church. It has been pointed out by theologians, that every attempt to try and deduct a plain structure of the church from the New Testament or any other source is bound to fail. According to them, both the pastoral letters and other sources on the history of the constitution look like a kaleidoscope, which one can shake this way or the other (Lietzmann 1977, 93; Houtepen 1967, 283). The World Council of Churches also reasons this way. In the document about 'Baptism, Eucharist and Office', it is beyond dispute for the Council that today's structures of the church cannot be derived straight from the Gospel, but that the church has to search for its own form under various circumstances. The church is therefore able to adjust itself. The World Council of Churches even puts it as an imperative: the church has to adjust itself. It has to search for the adequate form of testimony and service in every situation it finds itself in (Wereldraad 1982, 968). The structural forms, which have been negotiated at any given time and place, are backed up by the basic transitive character of the church.

2.3.2 Transitivity for the sake of the Gospel

Any ecclesiastical community intends to be in the service of the Gospel, either explicitly or implicitly. Transitivity as a structural principle, however, means a radicalization of this attitude. Consequently, ecclesiastical structures can be subordinated in favour of preaching the Gospel. Contrary to a hierarchical understanding of the church it is assumed here, that the structures of the church are not part of the Revelation. Bühlmann is a very drastic representative of this view when he formulates: "Besides the different existing ecclesiologies, it would be time... to write an exhaustive incarnational ecclesiology and to demonstrate what the incarnation of JESUS meant for the church: which does not mean that one should imitate JESUS's actions of the time in every way — JESUS who fought against the legal mentality of the Pharisees, did not want to impose the same mentality onto his church, but

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that, in each individual case, one should behave obediently, despite everything, in accordance with the real commendments of GOD, like JESUS did in his situation" (Bühlmann 1985, 178). Within this structural thought, the church can only then be completely in the service of the Revelation, if it is flexible. The church has received an assignment from the Gospel, to which it is committed. The World Council of Churches defines it as follows: "CHRIST opened a new access to the Holy Father. Through this, all faithful have been called upon to acknowledge their faith and to render account of it. They should join in the lives of all people, in their joy and in their sorrow. The members of the host of CHRIST should struggle together with the suppressed for freedom and truth, which have been promised with the arrival of the Kingdom of GOD. This assignment has to be executed under various political, social and cultural circumstances. However, in order to be able to execute this assignment accordingly, the adequate forms of testimony and service have to be looked for" (Wereldraad 1982, 968). This means, that one must not just search each time for suitable general forms of preaching, but that the structures themselves, are to be considered as well. The contents of this assignment is clear on the basis of this quotation, whereas the form and the structure have to be reshaped each time. The standard of ecclesiastical existence is the Gospel of JESUS. The ecclesiastical structures themselves are therefore regarded as being dynamic. At the same time, there is no denying that structures are necessary, on the contrary, the church has never been without people who had a special mission and never been devoid of leadership structures (Wereldraad 1982, 969).

References are made to the Bible for support of a transitive argumentation on the multiplicity of ecclesiastical structures and offices in the New Testament. With regard to the ecclesiastical office, it is stated that the scriptures of the New Testament themselves do not provide a technical concept for what we are used to calling an ecclesiastical office, even though it frankly mentions the office and the functions of the secular authority and the Old-Testamental priesthood and even names a large number of ecclesiastical functions (Käsemann 1977, 173; Dassmann 1991, 162). The structures of early Christianity therefore show a great range of variation, primarily with respect to the assignments and offices of laymen, women, as well as men. Schillebeeckx makes this clear, by dividing the time of the New-Testamental parishes into a phase of the Apostles and a post-Apostolic phase. The founders of the early Christian parishes usually are not local parish leaders, but always travelling preachers. As a rule, they appoint parish leaders before moving on. The names of the parish leaders and assistants of the Apostles, however, have not yet been decided on. In the first Epistle to the Thessalonians (1Thess. 5:12),

Paul, for example, speaks of workers for the parish, of principals or leaders in the sense of members who are particularly concerned about the parish. On the other hand, general Greek terms are used in Philippi. By means of a comparison between the first Epistle to the Thessalonians (1Thess. 5:12) and the first Epistle to the Corinthians (1Cor. 12:28) and the Epistle to the Philipians (Phil. 1:1), it is shown, for instance, how much the names for the function of the leader vary. And what these "Officials" all do within the scope of their "Office", cannot be extracted from the Epistles, either (Schillebeeckx 1980, 15-21). As for this New-Testamental phase it is observed, furthermore, that Paul himself refers nowhere to presbyterians, although a presbyterian church order is rather ancient within the Jewish-Christian parishes. Thus, Jacob takes important decisions together with presbyterians in the parish of Jerusalem, as can be deduced from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 11:30; 21:28) (Schillebeeckx 1980, 21).

2.4 Summary

The hierarchical structural principle set forth first, is based on the office of bishop. The bishop is thus joined with CHRIST horizontally by means of the *successio apostolica* and through the performance of the Eucharist vertically in *persona Christi*. Through the *potestas iurisdictionis*, which has been granted to him by means of his consecration, he is the official leader of his *bisdom*. The *potestas* of the priest has been derived from that of the bishop. Through his episcopal power of authority as leader of the local parish, he shares in its power of *iurisdiction* and with that, in the *successio apostolica*, whereby he is joined to CHRIST in a horizontal line, as well. The priest, like the bishop, performs the Eucharist oblation in *persona Christi*, through which he is also joined to CHRIST in a vertical line. The egalitarian principle set forth, is based on the fact that every worshipper is a carrier of charismatic gifts, and in view of this, has fully equal rights. These facts entitle him, regardless of any consecration or ecclesiastical authority, to have leadership in the church, too. Institutional guarantees or fixed structures are considered to be superfluous. The transitive structural principle that has been described above, is based on the ability and duty of adjustment of the construction of the church in favour of the Gospel. The way in which the leadership receives a concrete form within an ecclesiastical congregation, has to be renegotiated each time in the discussion with the context in which the ecclesiastical congregation is situated.

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3. The *sensus fidei* about the structure of the church

In the third paragraph that is discussed here, we will formulate two hypotheses based on the results concerning content of the preceeding paragraphs, and examine them empirically. The first hypothesis relates to the existence of structural principles in the consciousness of a number of Catholics that have been interviewed (Par. 3.1.). The second hypothesis relates to the evaluation of those principles by our respondents (Par. 3.2.).

3.1 The inquiry into the existence of structural principles in the consciousness of Catholics

The first hypothesis we want to examine empirically at this point, reads:

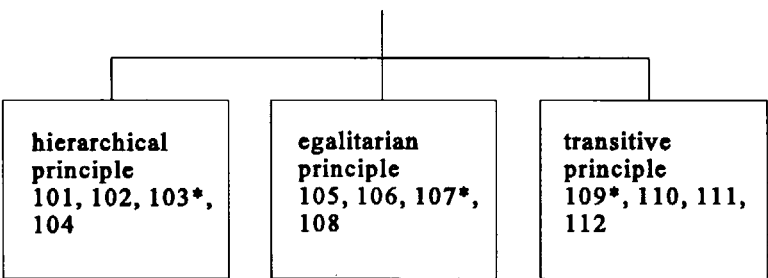
1. In the consciousness of the Catholics that have been interviewed, a hierarchical, an egalitarian and a transitive structural principle can be distinguished.

We would like to substantiate this hypothesis with the study of literature which has been carried out in the preceeding paragraphs. We assume that the ecclesiastical structural principles, which have been developed from theological literature, can be retraced in the consciousness of Catholics at the basis of the church.

In order to be able to verify empirically the hypothesis at hand, we have put the three structural principles described in the preceeding paragraph into operation with four items each, which can be found in the appendix. In the course of an investigation into participation in the parish, these were presented to Catholics in the German town of Kleve and the Dutch town of Oosterhout in the first half of 1990. The samples were taken at random from the parishes of the towns, that is, from the address files of the parishes a certain number of parish members were drawn by chance (De Groot 1981, 195-196). These members received by mail an appropriate questionnaire with the request to fill it in and return it. Of the 2464 questionnaires mailed out, we received a total of 441 back. This represented a return quota of 18%. Therefore, it cannot be regarded as a representative poll, since its results have only a limited explanatory value.

We have subjected the twelve items that were presented to a principal component analysis (rotation=varimax). The overall analysis showed the following picture:

DIAGRAM A: The ecclesiastical structural principles



As diagram A shows, after the overall analysis, three items remained for each structural principle. Thus we can speak of three factors. Those items assigned with an ‘*’ fell away. For the exclusion of the items we applied the following criteria: Communality $\geq .20$ and factor loading $\geq .40$, as well as their plain meaning of content (cf. Appendix, Table C). Cronbach's- α was computed for each factor, to assess the reliability of the scales.

The results of the three factors looked as follows in detail:

TABLE A: The results of the factor-analysis of the structural principles

	Eigenvalue	explained variance	Cronbach's- α
The hierarchical structural principle	2.33	25.9	.72
The egalitarian structural principle	1.57	17.5	.65
The transitive structural principle	1.38	15.3	.53

Table A shows that each time, the three items formed an independent factor, the Eigenvalue of which was satisfactorily high, that is ≥ 1 and its explained variance satisfied our demands as well, namely $\geq 40\%$. Our analysis has

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showed that the Catholics of our random sample differentiate between three alternative interpretations of the ecclesiastical structure. This means that in their consciousness, a hierarchical, an egalitarian, as well as a transitive structural principle of the church can be retraced. With this result, we can look upon our hypothesis as being confirmed.

3.2 The evaluation of the hierarchical, the egalitarian and the transitive structural principle

The fact that the three structural principles worked out in detail, can actually be retraced in the consciousness of the respondents, still does not answer the question how they are evaluated individually. We would like to formulate our expectations with respect to this in our second hypothesis. Below, we will prove it by means of arguments and subject it to an empirical examination. It reads:

2. The Catholics of our poll argue in favour of the egalitarian and the transitive structural principle, whereas they are opposed to a hierarchical structural principle

The following arguments can be taken into consideration for a justification of the positive attitude which could be expected with regard to the egalitarian and the transitive structural principle:

First, we assume that since the second Vatican Council, an ecclesiastical picture of the church has been found more and more in theology, which is based on the idea of the *communio* of all faithful. Starting from this idea, since the Council, ecclesiastical pictures have been drawn up by theologians and the idea of making the *communio* fertile for concrete practice has been tried out. As an example, we refer to the development of the liberation theology and its clearly formulated consequences of such a line of thinking for the ecclesiastical structure (Boff, L. & Boff, C. 1986). Another example is the new reflection of the parishes, requested over and over again by the theological side, on being a community of people as opposed to a community for people (Mette 1981; Mette & Blasberg-Kuhnke 1986).

Secondly, attention is called to the fact that various movements and organizations have been established, which try to translate these ideas of *communio* into the practice of the church. As for Germany, we refer to the 'Initiative Kirche von unten' (IKVU) and regarding the Netherlands the 'acht-mei-beweging' (AMB) can be mentioned. Both associations concentrate

on the the common responsibility of all faithful for a different church and are primarily supported by laymen.

Thirdly, we would like to refer to the different internal official developments and reforms which have taken place since the last Council. The following can be mentioned: the installation of the parish board in The Netherlands and in Germany as a board of laymen, the possibility for laymen to work as professional theologists in parishes, as well as the novel discovery of the permanent office of deacon. These developments of the past 30 years, of which only a few exemplary cases could be mentioned here, point at a basic ecclesiastical understanding among theologists as well as among believers and the official ecclesiastical leadership, which is supported by the idea of a community that springs from the conception of a common responsibility of priests and laymen for ecclesiastical life.

The arguments that have been mentioned, are in accordance with the assumption that the Catholics of our poll support those structural principles, which most clearly reflect the idea of a common responsibility, and these are the egalitarian and the transitive structural principle.

The following arguments can be mentioned regarding the assumed rejection of the hierarchical structural principle of the church:

The first argument refers to the many theological disputes, in which the hierarchical interpretation of the office is radically questioned by one side. For example, the conflicts surrounding Küng, particularly the controversy about his book 'Unfehlbar ?' (Küng 1970), the conflicts regarding Leonardo Boff's book 'Church: charisma and power' (Boff 1985) and the dispute about Drewermann regarding his criticism on a hierarchical justification of the spiritual office, as expressed in his book 'Kleriker' (Drewermann 1989). These conflicts have produced a great echo within the Catholic community and have led to letters of solidarity and demonstrations, which, to an extent, are still being produced. Taking this into account, we assume that the rejection of a hierarchical church, as it comes out in the work of the three theologists mentioned above, is also widely supported by the Catholics within the parishes and that a rejective attitude regarding a hierarchically composed church is much at life.

As a second argument of an ecclesiastical-political nature is the wide public interest in and reaction to centralistic appointments to the episcopal sees. In the Netherlands, the conflicts started as early as 1970 with the appointment of

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Simonis, known to be a conservative, to the See of Rotterdam without any participation of the authorized councils. This resulted in intense public reactions. Further appointments of bishops contrary to the public's wishes, followed in the Netherlands in the 70s and the 80s. Something similar could be observed in Germany. The enthronement of Cardinal Meisner to Archbishop of Cologne produced strong reactions from the population. From the side of the theologists, this led to the 'Cologne Declaration' with a broad national as well as international echo. These conflicts and the reactions at the basis of the church are a reason for us to expect a critical attitude, respectively rejection, of the Catholics of the poll regarding the hierarchical structural principle, too.

The basis of the examination of the hypotheses presented here, are the average values of each structural principle as well as the standard deviations. The possible answers ranged from "I do not agree at all"(1) "I do not agree"(2), "I do not know/I am uncertain"(3) to "I agree"(4) and "I agree completely" (5).

TABLE B: The evaluation of the structural principles

	average value	standard deviation
Hierarchical principle	3.26	1.22
egalitarian principle	4.07	.90
transitive principle	3.35	1.03

Table B shows the following result:
The egalitarian structural principle is assessed very high by the Catholics of the poll with an average value of 4.07 and a standard deviation of .90 on a 5-point-scale. The other two are situated more in the middle with an average value of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 1.03 for the transitive structural principle, and an average value of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 1.22 for the hierarchical structural principle, with the transitive structural principle doing slightly better than the hierarchical one. In view of these results, we are unable to find any confirmation of the hypotheses presented here. In the first

part of our hypothesis we stated, that the respondents would support a transitive structural principle just as clearly as an egalitarian one. This assumption proved to be incorrect. The egalitarian structural principle is evaluated with an average value of 4.07 on a 5-point-scale clearly higher than the transitive principle with an average value of 3.35. Therefore, the principle mentioned last, is not situated in the positive, but rather in the doubtful range, although with a clear inclination in positive direction. The standard deviation of .90 of the egalitarian principle, is clearly situated under 1.00 and leads to the conclusion of great uniformity within the random sample. The standard deviation of the transitive principle is slightly higher with 1.03. This means, that the conceptions of our respondents regarding the transitive principle are further apart than those regarding the egalitarian principle.

We cannot find any confirmation of our second assumption of a rejection of a hierarchical conception of the church, either. Although the model, which refers to a hierarchical structural principle model of the church, is evaluated most weakly with an average value of 3.24, it finds itself in the middle, which is the doubtful range, like the transitive principle. The high standard deviation of 1.22 points at a very different evaluation of this principle by the respondents.

4. Summary of the results that have been determined

As results of the empirical examination of our hypotheses, we can ascertain the following: the analysis has shown that the Catholics of our random sample in the Netherlands and in Germany differentiate between three clearly distinct conceptions regarding ecclesiastical structures. We can speak of a hierarchical, an egalitarian and a transitive ecclesiastical structural principle in the consciousness of the respondents. All in all, the hierarchical structural principle is evaluated slightly weaker than the transitive one. The Catholics of our random sample evaluate an egalitarian conception of the church clearly positive with a relatively small standard deviation. The evaluation of the transitive as well as the hierarchical structure moves within the medium evaluation category with a relatively high standard deviation of over 1.00, which points at large differences of opinion within the population.

In view of the formulated question of research mentioned in the introduction as to the *sensus fidei* regarding the structure of the church, we can state that the *sensus* of our respondents regarding the structure of the church is multi-form. Many a conception of the church, excluding one another, are found

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side by side in their consciousness. On the basis of the limited power of expression of this research, which is not a representative investigation, these results cannot be generalized, which means that they cannot be applied to the entire Catholic population. The fact of the correspondence of the conceptions of the church in the consciousness of people, as well as the fact, that these are evaluated differently, are sufficient indications for further empirical theological research in this area.

APPENDIX

The items:

- 101 The essential core of the church consists of the valid administration of the sacraments by the priests.
- 102 The church is a community of faithful, in which the priests are the real proclaimers of the Gospel.
- 103* Priests as leaders of an ecclesiastical community must have complete freedom in their decisions.
- 104 Without the official priesthood and the powers allied with it, an ecclesiastical community does not exist.
- 105 Because CHRIST did not wish to have fixed ecclesiastical structures, HE assigned gifts to everyone which are meaningful and useful for the church.
- 106 The church is a community of faithful, in which everyone is completely equal before GOD.
- 107* Because of the gifts assigned to everyone by GOD, authoritative structures are superfluous.
- 108 The church is a community of faithful, which is defined by every faithful member in accordance with his gifts which he has received from GOD.
- 109* The church is a community of faithful, whose existence is based on the assignment to put the Christian message into dialogue with today's society.
- 110 CHRIST wished that His church would adapt to any situation it would find itself in.
- 111 It is already stated in the Bible that the church has to adapt to the social environment, in order to be able to spread Christianity.
- 112 The church would have gone down long ago, if it had not been flexible towards its environment.

TABEL C: Structure of the church (Factor-analysis and Correlation-matrix)

	f1	f2	f3	h ²
101	.80			.67
102	.76			.62
104	.78			.62
105		.73		.56
106		.68		.51
108		.71		.50
110			.80	.66
111			.83	.70
112			.62	.43

f1 = The hierarchical principle

f2 = The egalitarian principle

f3 = The transitive principle

Correlations between the scales

	f1	f2
f2	.21	
f3	.10	.11

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